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The Workshop

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NATIONAL DOMESTIC INDUSTRY.*

By JACOB FALKE.

The historical element is also seen, and in a still greater degree, in textile fabrics and embroidery, in which objects the ornament is the chief consideration, as in pottery it is the form, and in jewellery the workmanship. Let us take for example the embroidery, woven stuffs, and tambour and lacework as practised in the extreme north, by the Finns and Laplanders. In the belts, chemises, caps and trimmings at which the females of those countries work in friendly companionship when confined to the house by the continued darkness of their winters, we meet with ornaments so simple and suitable, so old and original that we could almost believe that they derived their origin from the interior of Asia, the cradle of the human race, and that the very first emigrants had brought them with them from the countries beyond the Indus. They display combinations of geometrical figures, patterns often of a very rich and effective kind, which we meet with again and again in the history of ornamentation, in the most antique of antique pottery, in the urns and bronzes on the graves of the early middle ages, in mediæval Saracenic Art; everywhere indeed except among the Art treasures of modern European civilisation.

Let us now proceed from the north to the south, and call to mind the carpets and coverings of the countries on the lower Danube, Sclavonia and Wallachia, then those on the other side of the Mediterranean and the coasts of Africa, as we have been made acquainted with them through the different exhibitions and other opportunities. The present inhabitants of these countries

have very different origins, some being of Arabo-Saracenic, some of Sclavonian descent. And yet all the carpets which are woven by the peasants of these countries and their wives for their own home use have striking similarities and common properties. They have all a peculiar geometrical ornamentation, differing from any other patterns, and rich in coloring of a rather glaring character on the Danube, where green red and yellow predominate in unbroken tints, softer and better harmonised in Saracenic countries where an agreeable blue is intermixed, and the colors more blended together without losing anything of their richness. These common properties point back to much older times than even the middle ages where however we find a similar kind of ornamentation in the Saracenic silks of Spanish origin.

Besides the historical interest which these articles possessed, the attention of the lovers of Art was equally attracted by their beauty, a quality the more astonishing as they were produced exclusively by peasant hands and exclusively for peasant use, and that it was from the hands of men, women and children of tribes which we consider, and justly so in a certain respect, as barbarous, and entirely destitute of civilisation, that these earthenware vessels and silver ornaments were executed, these carpets and dresses woven, these girdles and laces embroidered. Whence did they derive their perception of the Beautiful, a flower of most delicate culture, but one which culture in a wrong direction may again destroy; instances of which may be seen at once if we compare many articles suited to modern taste with this popular taste of old.

It must be granted however, that many of these

* See page 1 ante.
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objects bore the stamp of a rude workmanship adapted only for peasant use. This is the case with some of the silver ornaments which differ widely in value and workmanship, and more especially, as might be expected from the nature of the material, in pottery. But, notwithstanding the sometimes rude exterior, it is just in pottery that the ancient beauty is retained, and we find very frequently shapes which invite immediate imitation, and which we stamp as old Grecian forms on account of their elegant proportions. But it is not the form only, but the coloring and the ornamental exterior which have pretensions to beauty. In this respect we will out of a multitude of examples select two only; first a kind of Turkish jar and vessel enamelled in green with ornaments in gold, which might be an appropriate ornament in every artistically decorated apartment, and secondly, the white and blue enamelled vases, plates and dishes domesticated in Morocco and the neighbouring Moorish states of the north coast of Africa, works of Art, which in their general effect as well as in the design of their intricate ornaments deserve to be studied as standard productions.

In respect of color, the element of beauty stands forth still more prominently in the different kinds of textile fabrics and embroideries. We are accustomed to declare that it is the bright sun of Southern skies which produces the colored effects in the vibrations of the air, and endows the inhabitants of those climes with the delights of more splendid colors; but there is scarcely any difference in this respect among those who live in high latitudes, under a pale sun, a grey sky and an almost eternal night. The embroideries of the Laplanders often astonish us by their colors no less than those of the before mentioned antiques and original patterns. The peasant costumes of the entire north blaze with bright colors, even in the case of the melancholy and solitary Dalecarlians. The broad striped insertions of various tints in their apron-like dresses are identical with the striped headgears of the Roman women and do not yield to them in beauty and effect. It is the same everywhere; the simple unsophisticated sense, not spoilt by modern culture, has been able to preserve a feeling which was formerly general in the best periods of Art. It is not the fault of civilisation that we, in our height of modern education, appear to have lost this feeling; it is the degeneration of style in Art the utter insipidity into which is sunk throughout its modern progress, but this is not a fault, an evil necessarily attendant on civilisation.

If then, as we have shown by the foregoing examples, to the historical interest there is added also the beauty of form, ornamentation and color, there must result also a third reason why these productions of National Industry attracted so much attention, and to this we have already here and there alluded.

The progress of modern taste, in the last centuries, the efforts at reform which have been excited in every province of Art-Industry, have been the reasons why after the used up forms of the Rococo had entirely disappeared, and naturalism had almost lost its once undivided meed of approval, new and better motives were sought for.

The styles of all past Art had been gradually plagiarised, the world was getting tired of eternal imitations and repetitions of well known types and ornaments, few of which could impart new life to Art, when here all at once was opened up a new and unsuspected source which at the most only required purification. A rich abundance of original forms, every one of which had been approved by practical use for hundreds of years, stood ready at hand, as well as a fund of ornaments both peculiar and rational, and capable of expansion and improvement. Just what the taste of the times needed, novelty in unison with beauty, propriety and sound reason was here uniting for the awakening, the ennobling and the adoption of modern Art.

And there are already many indications that this adoption is possible, nay, that it must necessarily take place if matters pursue a regular course of development. On more than one occasion in modern times has National Industry been summoned to the aid of modern Art, and well has it replied to the summons. We need only appeal to the fact we have already mentioned, of the Roman goldsmith Castellani having gone to the remotest mountainous districts for workmen, when wishing to revive the ancient filigree ornaments. The same Castellani exhibited in the Paris Exposition of 1867 a collection of Italian peasant ornaments which excited great attention, and is now become the property of the South Kensington Museum. From these have already been derived numerous motives not without classical reminiscences, which have been utilised for modern Art. The Norwegian filigree work also, till of late mere peasant ornament, has already become a model for modern Art, which ennobling and refining it, has produced many specimens of classical beauty. Their textile fabrics have also become models for modern industry, witness a fashion of the latest date, the cross-striped ribbons and aprons which are evidently derived from the Roman peasant costume, though none of the French imitations have succeeded in rivalling the colors of the originals. It is the same with one of the most striking elements of Spanish peasant costume, the colored Menta which the men use for a mantle. Its striped patterns have been the origin of a material for furniture and curtains which has long been the only one of really good taste. Quite lately also has the Menta become the parent of another kind of wonderfully effective coverings. In Hyde Park, scarcely any equipage is seen in which the ladies' knees are not protected from the cold by a covering which is a direct offspring of the Menta.

These are but single examples, but they point the way, and teach the importance of National Industry even to those who do not look upon it with the eye of an artist. It proves also unequivocally the utility of its fullest possible exhibition, especially if conducted from a practical and artistic point of view. It is high time however that the attention of the artistic and industrial world should be directed to it, as well as to the national costumes, for the swift, all levelling civilisation of the present day, to which neither the highest mountains nor the remotest valleys present any obstacle, will

soon attack them also, and sweep them away without any hope of return. To retain and protect them from this modern movement would be a vain attempt, they would beyond all doubt soon come to an end. The only means of saving them and preserving what is good in them, would be to adopt them into modern Art and so improve them. They would then enter into the historical development, would survive, and be transmitted to posterity in worthier guise.

Objectively considered, the productions of national domestic industry may be divided into four principal groups. Of these pottery and textile fabrics, the latter including embroidery and all kinds of lace-work are, as we have already shown by several examples, the most important, especially in respect of their influence on modern Art-Industry. The third group comprises the ornamental works in the precious metals. The fourth embraces the whole collection of articles for domestic use, including on the one hand carved, painted and peculiarly constructed furniture, and on the other hand mats and coverings. Vessels and articles of the less precious metals are of much less importance.

It is not however from the national point of view, that we here desire to review the objects of national industry, but from the geographical, taking the different countries in the order of their position. We do not limit ourselves exclusively to Europe though our attention is more especially directed to it, but we make no pretension to completeness even for Europe in our review. On the contrary we fully allow its imperfection and only wish its deficiencies may be compensated for by the emulation our words may excite. We confine ourselves to what we have seen and remarked ourselves, or what has been brought under our notice by artists of acknowledged sincerity and merit.

From the Pyrenæan peninsula, we might naturally expect a rich abundance of material, but though in other respects the Paris Exhibition of 1867 offered an appropriate picture of this branch of Spanish and Portuguese industry, it showed us little, in proportion, of old tradition from the times once so flourishing of Arabian industry. The above named Menta, the Spanish mantle, belongs certainly to these kinds; its richly colored ornamentation, so graceful in its harmony, is a decided indication of its Arabian origin. Though differently worn, and cut in a different manner, it is, as an object of costume and of artistic interest, simply a descendant and variety of the Burnos. How it is now applied, and how its ornamentation may be turned to advantage our former examples sufficiently show. With the exception of this Menta, however, there is little to be found in Spanish costume, that is of any value for us. The country or provincial costumes belong all to the last centuries. Even the lace veil, which dates its origin from the latter half of the sixteenth century has not preserved the regular old pattern of its time, but together with its ornaments has taken quite a French and modern form. It is possible that the peasants' ornaments may have re-

tained their old and original form, but this is scarcely the case with their articles of domestic use.

The earthenware vessels, on the contrary, present some points of interest. In Portugal there are earthenware vessels of a remarkably beautiful red clay, resembling the antique terra sigillata, and of varied shapes, altogether original, some very beautiful, some of excentric form, in which are introduced ornaments of no definite character. Spain has also cooling vessels of grey or light yellow clay, slightly baked, but not glazed, of light and elegant shape, similar to those we now find in use in the East. Their ornaments consist of flowers, lines and designs of the same material, which seem to be applied upon them, in a thick and sticky state just as confectioners apply their ornaments of white sugar. In design, these ornaments do not display much character; still less in their form, though among them there are some richly executed, and bearing the stamp of a certain degree of richness. We find also rich services consisting of a great number of dishes, vases, large and small vessels, with coquettish looking tassels of red wool, which are naturally only for ornament and not for use. Another kind of Spanish pottery is glazed and ornamented in the style of the majolica, and seems to be a tradition of the majolicas of the sixteenth century. There is a third species of original vessels from the Biscayan provinces, as well as the peculiar glass vessels of Catalonia of which however we cannot speak here, as they have not come under our own observation.

Most remarkable, however, are the Portuguese mats and coverings of plaited wood, which from an artistic point of view rank with the best of their kind. In modest coloring, appropriate to the material, they show, in rich development, geometrical ornaments suggested from the nature of the plait work, and have a quiet but so much the more successful effect. In other respects the domestic utensils of the Spanish peninsula have little interest for us.

Passing over into France, the Pyrenees present us with a very peculiar kind of earthenware such as the *poteries muracées* in the village of Ordizan near Bigorre, made without any wheel. Probably also the southern districts of France formerly colonised by Greeks and Romans, still possess earthenware vessels in which are to be found numerous reminiscences of the antique forms. But as far as our knowledge extends, these objects have not yet made their appearance in the great Exhibitions. In France, indeed, there is little of old tradition still to be found. France, in the last centuries has become an eminently industrial country, and her manufactures have stifled domestic industry. All her activity and attention is directed to Fashion, and is therefore turned away from that which is so directly antagonistic to it. If we are in error, and if there are still to be found there, any such national artistic elements as we are speaking of here, these lines may perhaps be of some utility in bringing them to the light of publicity.

(To be continued in our next.)